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West Wing of the White House







F O R E W O R D

Welcome to the West Wing of the White House, unquestionably the most important suite of executive offices in the world. The Oval Office is here, as are the offices of the President's immediate staff. In many ways the evolution of the design of this building represents the evolution of the Presidency since 1902, when Theodore Roosevelt directed its construction.

This document is intended to help you as you tour the West Wing. We hope you will find it informative and interesting.

Washington, D.C., 1995



The Architecture of the West Wing of the White House



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P R E F A C E

The building herein discussed is now referred to as the West Wing of the White House. Prior to 1947, it was called the Executive Offices. When the Department of State vacated the adjacent building (originally the State, War, and Navy Building) that building became known as the Executive Office Building, (now the Old Executive Office Building or OEOB). To avoid confusion, the White House office building became known as the West Wing of the White House.

This document will use the current reference, "West Wing", rather than the name that may have been current in each period described.

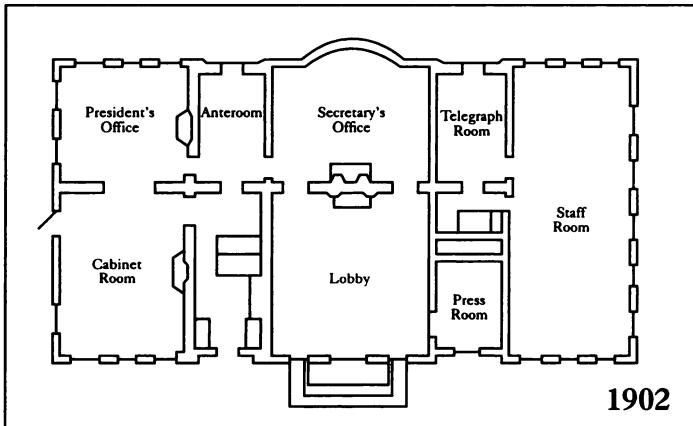
The history of the West Wing dates to the early years of the White House. President Thomas Jefferson, the first full-term occupant of the White House, proposed one-story extensions to the east and the west intended to connect the President's House to the adjacent executive office buildings. The construction of these additions, although reduced in scope, was carried out under the supervision of architect Benjamin Latrobe from 1805-1808. President Jefferson's design concepts survive in part in the colonnaded terraces that today connect the residence with the East and West Wings.

The terraces, as constructed, were used for household functions and did not provide additional office space. The president continued to live and work in the White House proper for the remainder of the century with his executive offices taking up much of the eastern half of the second floor. Official and family needs, however, made this arrangement unsatisfactory. For example, in 1860, a state visit by Edward, Prince of Wales, was distressing for the Buchanan Administration due to the lack of appropriate guest accommodations in the mansion. In response to these crowded conditions, several plans for expansion were devised in the last quarter of the century. Elaborate schemes were set forth under the Harrison, Cleveland, and McKinley Administrations, but it was not until 1902, under the direction of President Theodore Roosevelt, that an expansion actually took place.



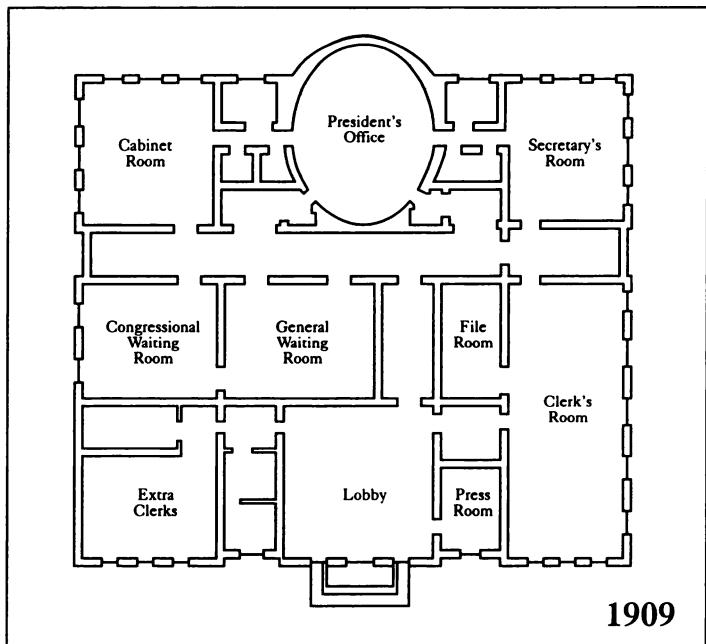
1902

The eminent architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White was commissioned by President Theodore Roosevelt to undertake a much needed renovation of the White House. To alleviate the problems caused by crowded conditions in the Executive Residence, an addition on the west side was designed to house the executive offices temporarily. Charles Follen McKim, the senior partner in charge of the project, was ever-mindful of the need to harmonize the proposed extension with both James Hoban's original design of the residence and the original Jeffersonian colonnade. The colonnade was to be left in place, while the complex of greenhouses built since 1857 was to be removed. President Roosevelt imposed a severe time constraint on the project; within six months the greenhouses were gone and the new office facility (called the Executive Office Building) was built at the end of the colonnade. Despite Congressional criticism of the project, McKim's design was a success in its architecturally subdued approach, which set a precedent for subsequent expansions of the West Wing.



1909

However successful McKim's design was architecturally, it was not long before the expanding role of the president again required a larger staff and, consequently, additional office space. Even before President Theodore Roosevelt left office in 1909, planning was initiated to meet the need. Under President William Howard Taft, a design



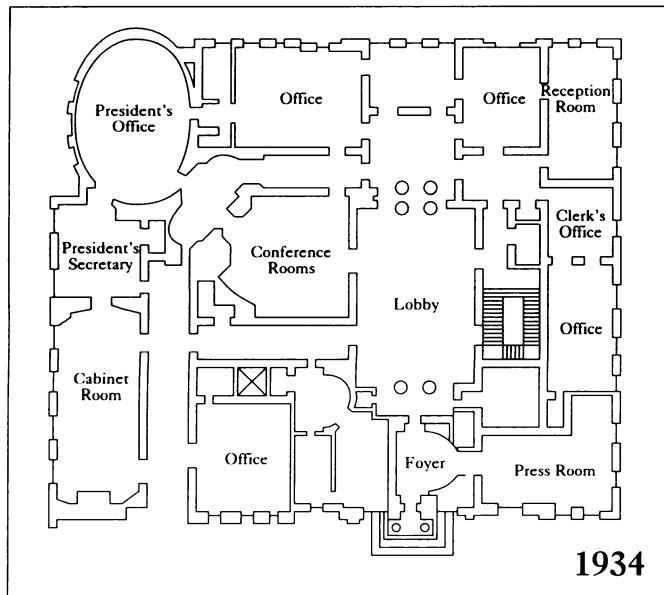
competition was held in 1909 for an addition to McKim's building. Obviously, the perception of McKim's design had gone beyond that of "temporary", and the issue was one of harmonizing the proposed addition not only with James Hoban's design for the mansion, but also with McKim's design of the executive office building. Eventually, President Taft selected the designs of Washington architect Nathan Wyeth which virtually doubled the available office space by the addition of a southern extension built on the site of the 1902 tennis court. Wyeth's floor plan moved the president's office from the southeast corner of the 1902 building to the center of the new south facade and changed its shape from a square to an oval, thus echoing the elliptical rooms designed by Hoban for the mansion. The Cabinet Room was moved from the northeast corner to the southeast corner of the building.

The additional office space provided by the 1909 construction proved sufficient for the time. In the spring of 1929, however, crowded conditions led President Herbert Hoover to order some changes, including the enlargement of the lobby. On Christmas Eve of that same year, President Hoover witnessed a fire which badly damaged the recently modified West Wing. During the fire, President Hoover's son and secretary rushed into the Oval Office to save the document-filled drawers of the President's desk. President Hoover was forced to move

his offices to the neighboring State, War and Navy Building (now referred to as the Old Executive Office Building or OEOB). The ensuing reconstruction of the West Wing, which included an attic and a new roof, provided an unexpected opportunity for the installation of a new technology: air conditioning.

I 9 3 4

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Administration increased the number of presidential staff, necessitating another expansion of the West Wing. In 1934, planning was initiated to provide additional office space, and architect Eric Gugler was selected for this design commission. Rather than distort the proportions of the building by extending it further to the south, the architect convinced President Roosevelt that the addition of a second story would be appropriate. Setting the additional build-



ing volume behind the existing first floor parapet solved not only the problem of space, but also preserved the architectural integrity of both the Executive Residence and McKim's design. Because the plan included the further excavation and expansion of the basement, the entire structure was gutted, leaving only the northern, parts of the eastern, and western walls standing. President Roosevelt and his staff were relocated to the second floor of the Residence during the renovation.

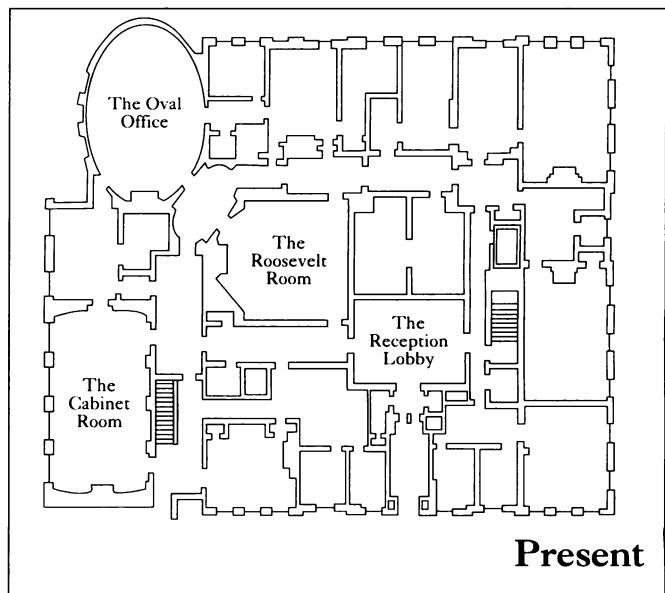
The 1934 renovation gave the West Wing floor plan the essential character that it retains today, with the Oval Office in its present location at the southeast corner of the building, the Cabinet Room to the north of the

Oval Office, and the Roosevelt Room diagonally across the hall from the Oval Office. The Reception Lobby and surrounding offices also retain approximately their original locations, although these spaces have been altered somewhat during succeeding administrations.

Present

The 1934 renovation marked the last substantial structural changes that have been made in the West Wing (the name which came into common usage after this time). In 1946, President Harry S. Truman favored a major renovation proposed by White House architect Lorenzo Winslow, a plan which would have changed the character of the building. This proposal was opposed by The American Institute of Architects, the organization President Theodore Roosevelt had entrusted to preserve and protect the architectural integrity of the White House and its adjuncts, and was never executed.

President Richard M. Nixon ordered a number of changes in the West Wing in 1969-70, including the creation of additional offices which resulted in a reduction in the size of the Reception Lobby, and the creation of the Press Center within the West Terrace. Even with the addition of the porte-cochere and circular drive that today serves as the northern entrance to the Reception Lobby, the exterior appearance of the building was not modified substantially. Alterations that have been made in the last 50 years have been matters of interior design and decoration.



The Reception Lobby

Visitors who come to the West Wing to meet with the President or his staff are welcomed in the Reception Room.

When the West Wing was erected in 1902, a rectangular lobby occupied the center of the north side of the building, opening directly to the driveway beneath a small porch. In 1929, under President Herbert Hoover, the lobby was elongated into a "T" shape.

In 1934, when the President's Oval Office and the Cabinet Room were moved into the eastern extension of the West Wing, a new lobby was created at the center of the building with access via a narrow foyer leading from the entrance on the north.

The somewhat informal character of this lobby, which was a general waiting room for both distinguished visitors and the press alike, was captured by artist Norman Rockwell in a four-panel illustration entitled *So You Want to See the President*, drawn for the November 13, 1943, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. The original artwork, showing a variety of people seated in red leather chairs and sofas around a massive center table carved with water buffalo heads, can be seen on the north wall of the ramp outside the Press Room.

With the construction of new press facilities in the west colonnade in 1970 by the Nixon Administration, the lobby was renovated to provide a smaller, more intimate reception room. The southern portion of the room was converted into two staff offices entered from the south corridor. The plaster cornice of the remaining north half of the room was retained and replicated on the new south wall. At the same time, the foyer was provided with a new marble floor and mahogany doors, and a porte-cochere was added to the north facade of the West Wing to provide a more formal, protected entry.

(For a description of the artwork in the Lobby, refer to the attached Brief Description of the Art supplement)

The Roosevelt Room

The Roosevelt Room presently occupies the site of the president's office and anteroom in the original West Wing design of 1902. The wooden mantel now in this room was, in fact, made for the 1902 President's Office. When the Wing was expanded to the south in 1909, this site became part of two waiting rooms. It now serves as a conference room across the corridor from the Oval Office which was relocated when the Wing was expanded to the east in 1934. At that time, a skylight was installed, lit from a shaft passing through the Wing's new second floor.

This room was first referred to as the "Fish Room" because of the aquariums and fishing mementos displayed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The tradition of this name continued into the early 1960's when President John F. Kennedy displayed a large mounted sailfish which he had caught near Acapulco, Mexico.

During the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the room was called the Presidential Reception Room. It was given its present name by President Richard M. Nixon in 1969 to honor the contributions of President Theodore Roosevelt in initiating the construction of the West Wing and of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in enlarging the Wing to its present size. At that time, portraits of both Roosevelts were placed in the room, and the 1934 skylight was covered by a false ceiling.

The flags for each of the five uniformed services are displayed at the west end of the room along with the U.S. Flag. They are displayed in the order of official/ceremonial precedence of the services (Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard). Attached to each service flag are a series of streamers depicting wars, campaigns, specific battles, etc. in which the particular service participated. Streamers may also represent foreign recognition of the U.S. military services as well as specific Presidential citations. They are awarded in recognition of heroism or meritorious service that is the result of a group effort.

In August 1988, the skylight was uncovered during the installation of new ceiling lighting. This eight-foot by eight-foot panel, framed by a classical Greek key motif, was replicated with the substitution of fluorescent backlighting.

(For a description of the artwork in the Roosevelt Room, refer to the attached Brief Description of the Art supplement)

The Cabinet Room

In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt moved his office and Cabinet Room from the eastern portion of the second floor of the mansion to new quarters in the West Wing. The Cabinet Room was located in the northeast corner, and the President's Office, which was then a rectangular room, was in the southeast corner. The fireplace mantel in the room today was made for the 1902 Cabinet Room.

In 1909, President William Howard Taft expanded the wing to the south, constructing the first Oval Office at the center of this addition and moving the Cabinet Room to the southeast corner. In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in an easterly expansion, moved the Oval Office to its present southeast corner location and returned the Cabinet Room to the northeast corner.

In August 1982, during the administration of President Ronald Reagan, architectural and decorative changes were made in the room. On the north wall, two niches which had been covered by doors, were restored to house pieces of sculpture. On the west wall, two false doors were removed. The entire room was painted a beige tone with the cornice and other architectural features highlighted in white. A green wool rug with a gold and green classical border, which had been ordered during the Johnson Administration but installed early in the Nixon Administration, remains in the room as do the table, chairs, and lighting fixtures acquired in 1970.

Traditionally, each new president selects portraits of favorite former presidents to be hung in the Cabinet Room. When the Cabinet meets around the large conference table, each Cabinet member is assigned a chair positioned at the table according to the seniority of the department represented. Traditionally, when Cabinet members conclude their terms of service, they are permitted to purchase their cabinet chairs, which bear brass plates indicating their cabinet position(s), and dates of service. The taller chair at the center of the east side of the table is occupied by the President.

(For a description of the artwork in the Cabinet Room, refer to the attached Brief Description of the Art supplement)

The Oval Office

The Oval Office is the President's formal workspace, where he confers with heads of state, diplomats, his staff, and other dignitaries; where he often addresses the American public and the world on television or radio; and where he deals with issues of the day.

The current Oval Office was constructed when the West Wing was expanded in 1934. Architectural features of the present Oval Office include: the Presidential Seal in plaster relief in the ceiling; the marble mantel designed in the classical order which was original to the 1909 Oval Office; the doors to the veranda and study, each with a pediment above a horizontal fasces, the classical symbol of the governing authority; and the window and shelf niches with shell canopies.

In August 1981, this room was painted in its current color scheme—off-white walls with the cornice and woodwork highlighted with a purer white.

In 1982, a new floor of walnut and white oak was added. This hardwood floor replaced a simulated wood-grain vinyl installed in 1969 during the administration of President Richard M. Nixon. That floor, in turn, had replaced a cork flooring installed in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's new office in 1934.

During August 1988, the cove lighting around the ceiling of the Oval Office was improved using the most recent developments in fluorescent lamp technology. These new fixtures, which are more compact and provide light of warmer color, replaced lights originally installed during the administration of President Richard M. Nixon.

While the architectural features of the Oval Office remain constant, the interior furnishings often change. On January 20, 1993, with the inauguration of President Clinton, new gold damask draperies were installed, consisting of a six-swag valance and three pairs of straight overcurtains in a popular 18th-century acanthus leaf pattern. At the same time, the two high-back armchairs before the fireplace, were reupholstered in a gold fabric. The changes to the Oval Office were completed in August 1993, under the direction of Little Rock designer, Kaki Hockersmith. An ornamental blue tape was added as trim to the drapery valance and panels. The two sofas acquired in 1990 were rebuilt and recovered in a red-and-cream striped silk with pillows of red silk decorated with gilt leaf medallions. The seats of the cane-backed armchairs around the room were recovered in a specially made blue silk called "Little Rock diamond".

A new oval wool carpet was woven for the room. A dark blue field centers a full-color Presidential Coat-of-Arms encircled by fifty white stars and framed by a gilt rope band nestled into a plain red band. This framing band is repeated on the exterior of the rug's border which features green olive branches and gold laurel wreaths separated by red rosettes on a white field, framed on the interior by a gold rope band.

The President's desk, known as the "Resolute" desk, was made from the oak timbers of the British ship H.M.S. Resolute as a gift to President Rutherford B. Hayes from Queen Victoria in 1880. It has been used by every president since Hayes, excepting Presidents Johnson, Nixon, and Ford.

(For a description of the artwork in the Oval Office, refer to the attached Brief Description of the Art supplement.)

